

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



7 March 2000

Taking The Essence And Meaning Of This Life

Firstly we should all cultivate the right motivation, which is the bodhicitta mind, thinking that the reason we are receiving these profound teachings is to achieve the enlightened state of buddhahood. □

As the Lama Tsong Khapa prayer says:¹

“This life which has leisure is more precious than the wishing-jewel;
So difficult to find it is as quickly gone as lighting in the sky.
Thus realise that all worldly activities are like chaff in the wind,
and seize the essence of leisure and opportunity day and night.
The reverend Lama practised like this
Those desiring liberation should do likewise.”

As this prayer says when you think of achieving some purpose in life, this human life you have achieved now is more meaningful and more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel. Not only is it precious but it is extremely rare to find such a life. We have to seize the opportunity to use it now, because we may not achieve this life form again. By realising the preciousness and rarity of this life, understanding its value, and fully utilising its potential, we can accomplish all our temporary and long term goals.

It is also important to understand the qualities of this life. If it is going to last forever, then we can postpone taking its essence. However as the Lama Tsong Khapa prayer says, we have to remember that life is as impermanent as a lightning flash, so we cannot delay making use of it.

The Three Scopes Of Spiritual Practice

One must be very clear about the true purpose or essence of this perfect human rebirth. We can understand it at three different levels.

At the minimum or **small level** the purpose is to utilise this life in order to achieve a better rebirth in future, as either a human or godly being. The **intermediate purpose** is to achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence. The **supreme purpose** of this life is to achieve complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Of course day-to-day pursuits are very appealing to our mind, by appearing to have great value, but in fact they are of no value. From the point of view of the spiritual teachings the purpose or essence of this life falls into one of these above three categories. If we do not think it does, then we are misleading ourselves, and pursuing something of no essence.

The Small Scope

At a minimum, we have to understand that seeking the small purpose of life is seeking a goal beyond this life. It is said that only by having a goal beyond this life does this justify having obtained this human life.

We have to gain some conviction about the existence of a future life. In fact, most major religions of this world propose

the existence of future life. It is important to understand that there is a future life, because if there is no life after this one, why should we bother about what happens after this one?

From a philosophical point of view what does 'future life' mean? We all know that when we die this body completely disintegrates. Somewhere in this self we have a notion of 'I'. Does that also disintegrate with the body? If we investigate we find that it does not, and that when the body disintegrates the self, or 'I', continues its journey. If we examine further, what else beside the 'I' continues? It is the mind. It is the only element accompanying the 'I' or self into the future life.

For the sake of argument, if we have this understanding then the whole teaching of the Lord Buddha makes sense by focusing as it does upon our mind accumulating positive qualities, while diminishing negative ones.

To achieve a happy human rebirth in the future, the main practice to follow is the spiritual teaching on the small stages of the path. In this we study the practice of taking refuge, the karmic law of cause and effect, the sufferings that exist in lower rebirths, as well as death and impermanence. The factor which determines whether our immediate next rebirth will be a lower or higher rebirth is the karmic factors stored in our mental continuum. Going to a lower or higher rebirth is determined by the white or black karmic imprints on our mind.

In following the small stages of the path it is very important for us to see our purpose beyond this life, and through this not have a mind which is caught up with the affairs and goals of this life.

The most important teaching is taking refuge, which is not by just mouthing the words. It has to come from the heart with a deep understanding of our own mind. We have to realise the two main causes of taking refuge which are:

1. Some sense of fear or insecurity, which has to arise because of an understanding of the sufferings of lower rebirth, which are inevitable unless you do something to prevent that lower rebirth from happening.
2. You turn towards the object of refuge for protection, guidance and refuge.

However more important than placing hope and faith in the object of refuge, is following the instruction of the refuge objects. In summary, this instruction is the practice of accumulating positive actions by always sustaining a positive state of mind, such as loving-kindness towards other beings. At the same time one should strive to eliminate negative actions, thoughts, and states of mind.

If we do this practice for just one minute of every day in our life, we are at least doing something to extract the essence of this life.

Medium Scope

The medium or intermediate purpose of life means broadening our mental scope by understanding that achieving the small purpose is very temporary and not enough, and that it is not the complete solution of our problems. So one thinks 'I must achieve the state of liberation because that will fully satisfy all my wishes, and fulfil all my hopes of ending suffering for

¹ Lama Tsong Khapa, 'Concise Meaning of the Stages of the Path'

ever'. The main practice of this middle stage of the path is the Four Noble Truths - the Truth of Suffering, the Truth of the Cause of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering and the Path leading to the Cessation.

With a broad mental perspective one can comprehend this whole teaching of the middle stages of the path, and see the possibility of achieving the everlasting state of liberation, permanently removing all suffering. Then, all one's spiritual practice and daily activities will be directed towards achieving that goal. That is extracting the medium purpose of life. In the middle stages of the path one understands, and follows the threefold training, and so understands the Truth of the Path, thus advancing to the Truth of Cessation.

Great Scope

To extract the great essence or purpose of this life is to direct every action towards achieving complete enlightenment for the sake of all beings. The emphasis of spiritual life is on generating love and compassion for others, with a primary concern for their needs. Through fully developing this love and compassion, there is some sense of universal responsibility and superior intention, so that not only do you feel love and compassion but you also feel a sense of personal responsibility to take all their problems upon yourself.

However merely mentally assuming responsibility for others is not going to fully benefit them. To do that requires special resources and capabilities. Then we realise that the only ones in that position are fully enlightened buddhas, and so we aspire to achieve the fully enlightened state as the means to benefit all beings. This altruistic aspiration is the bodhicitta mind, and it is the main feature of the Mahayana teaching. To achieve the supreme purpose of this life the most important practice in daily life is cultivating this bodhicitta mind.

The Source of Unhappiness

When we talk of the importance of shifting our interest from this life to future lives we might wonder whether we shall have enough happiness in this life, finding all the things we need. First of all we need to find out the main source of our continuous unhappiness and dissatisfaction in our day-to-day life. When we examine, we find that the main cause is that our mind is too attached to this life. That is why we are not happy, no matter how much wealth and possessions we accumulate. There is never enough!

How do we achieve happiness and satisfaction in this life? The spiritual teachings place an emphasis on future lifetimes, by generating an awareness of death, and our situation after death. The immediate and direct effect of such a meditation is to reduce our clinging to this life in a way that turns our mind closer to our real situation. The way we are living our life and the way we are viewing things is very deluded, and somehow we become trapped in those deluded fantasies, causing unending worry and suffering.

In fact we can all understand that the reality is, as the Buddha said, "The end of meeting is departing, the end result of birth is death, the end result of accumulating is losing and the end result of rising is falling". If that is reality then why is our mind still attached to things which are subject to loss and disintegration? This shows us how our mind plays tricks on us.

For this reason Shantideva has said: "Even though what we have cherished is happiness yet our ignorance prevents or destroys the cause of happiness as if it were our enemy. Yet although our wish is to be separated from suffering, we always run after it by creating its causes."

Regardless of future lives, to bring about mental peace and satisfaction in this life we have to free ourselves from attachment to this life since it is that which brings suffering in this life. With attachment we cannot gain satisfaction out of the possessions we have accumulated in this life, and when the mind is attached to material objects they can torment us.

Geshe Doga says that there are some wealthy people who can understand how instead of bringing security, wealth can bring insecurity, dissatisfaction, and fear.

If we think about these teachings, especially the teaching on death and impermanence, we can diminish attachment and clinging to this life, and even though the focus of the meditation is on the betterment of future lives, it can also bring more peace and satisfaction now. Everything becomes more meaningful, and we find more satisfaction in this life.

The teaching tonight is to give you a framework with which to undertake your spiritual practice. Our own mind is the focus for whatever spiritual activity we undertake. Why? Because it is the source of all the happiness we want and the suffering we do not want. If we relate our view of a situation to our mind, then we can see the good and bad in our own mind.

There is no question that whatever we choose to do in our life is done with the hope of improving the quality of life - of finding more happiness and satisfaction. However despite whatever changes we make in our life there is always frustration. Even if we do achieve what we want to achieve, the satisfaction only lasts a short while, and soon we find that something is not right.

If we observe what goes on in our own mind as we go through life, we find that we are always struggling to find happiness, and we suffer when we do not find it. For instance, many people suffer when they cannot find a partner with whom to live their life, because they have the view that finding the right partner is going to bring satisfaction in life. So there is the suffering of not finding a partner. Then having found someone, there is doubt about whether they have found the right person. Even if it is the right person, then after a while some problem arises, and they believe that they have failed because they are suffering, rather than feeling the hoped-for happiness.

From where are these fluctuations of feelings and emotions coming? They come from the thoughts and attitudes in our own mind. The root cause is our ignorance, and based on that ignorance we give way to our desires. Desire within relationships is the main cause of suffering. In other words, we suffer because we cannot obtain objects which are appealing, beautiful or pleasant to our mind, and when we obtain them, we fear losing them, or we worry if they will last for ever. These emotional instabilities are derived from the desire in our own mind. Likewise anger and hatred also generate suffering in our life.

It is important to understand how beneficial and effective it is for us to relate the cause and effect of what we experience in our life to our mind, and then try to change, bringing a sense of more happiness and preventing suffering by changing our mind. To be honest, uprooting desire or hatred is an almost impossible, unrealistic goal for the beginner. Although it is an unachievable goal, if we familiarise ourselves with, or engage in specific meditations to overcome this desire or hatred, we can at least decrease the intensity of the desire whenever it arises and causes some problem. Then we can overcome these problems. Meditation means to familiarise oneself with knowledge of desire and the various techniques to overcome it. Then it is very much easier to apply these techniques when we want to do so.

As the great master Padampa Sangye said, "Be your own master so you are in control of yourself and judge of your own actions." Whether you are good or evil is not something judged by outsiders. It is you who have the best knowledge of your own qualities and faults.

Before we finish, Geshe Doga advises that newcomers to the study group should do some study on the topic of calm abiding which we have covered so far. We started this topic last year and in the next teaching we shall continue with it.

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14 March 2000

As usual, try to cultivate the right motivation by thinking, "I shall attain the state of Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, and it is for this reason that I am taking this teaching, and that I am determined to put it into practice."

When you generate this bodhicitta mind, you are generating an altruistic attitude of benefiting other beings - an attitude which shows care and love towards others. You should therefore think of the benefit of generating even a thought of benefiting others. As Shantideva said, if you think of removing the pain of a headache from a single sentient being the benefit is enormous, let alone the benefit of removing the suffering and pain of all sentient beings.

We should try to develop our understanding of the benefit of extending help to other beings, and gain some conviction about it. Through this there is also the benefit of enhancing personal peace and happiness. It is said the root cause for this personal peace and happiness lies within ourself. If this is so, then what can be identified and recognised as the root cause of that peace and happiness? If we investigate, then we can see that it is cultivating the altruistic mind towards others.

Generating such a mind requires that we train our mind, which begins with making an effort to try to transform our mental attitude from its habitual self-centredness, into a mind which cherishes other beings. Given enough mental training, this culminates with having the same mental attitude of sympathy towards all beings without any discrimination. Regardless of like or dislike, love or hate, you show your sense of love and compassion fully.

With a trained mind, if you observe some suffering or dissatisfaction of another being, your immediate response is a wish for that being to be free from suffering, thinking how wonderful it would be if that being was free from suffering. Similarly, if you observe another being possessing joy and happiness, you think how wonderful it is that they have that joy and happiness, and you wish that happiness to last for a long time. This kind of mental attitude which you show equally to all other beings who you either love or hate shows true love and compassion towards other beings.

What you will find, is that by generating such an altruistic mental attitude you have counteracted and diminished the self-cherishing mind, and this results in more inner peace and happiness. We can understand this by checking how all our day-to-day problems are created by this self-cherishing mind: there is no end to

them. When we put an end to the self-cherishing mind, we have prevented the main cause of the problems.

Try to understand, as much as possible, the benefits of cultivating this altruistic mind, and the benefits of overcoming the self-cherishing mind. On a regular basis, try each day to think of cultivating the altruistic mind. Then, as we undertake our various daily actions, think of conjoining all our actions with this altruistic mind: make an effort to constantly remember the benefits of this altruistic mind.

This practice of cultivating an altruistic mind and overcoming the selfish mind is a mind training practice. It is directly related to bringing about change within our mind. As said before, in order to engage in this practice, we first have to thoroughly examine our mind, develop an understanding of it, and see the advantages and disadvantages that can result from both the altruistic and the selfish ways of thinking respectively.

As much as possible, we must first develop our wisdom knowledge and through this wisdom knowledge, try to motivate ourself into changing our habitually selfish way of thinking. The difference between the self-cherishing mind, and the mind which cherishes other beings, is that with the self-cherishing mind, we are thinking merely of ourself. The self or the 'I' is so precious! When we have the strong self-cherishing mind, it is very natural that we are always concerned about our own needs: finding our own happiness, and avoiding suffering.

If, through this mind training, we cultivate the mind of cherishing other beings, then our whole thought process is transformed. Instead of being merely concerned with ourself, we are concerned about others, wanting them to find happiness, and wanting to eliminate their suffering.

Which Mind Is More Beneficial To Generate?

1. We can think in terms of the number of beings involved. The self-cherishing mind thinks of only one person, the self. It thinks only of possessing happiness or eliminating problems and suffering for oneself. Whereas, when you think of other sentient beings, you are thinking of a countless number of beings.

Even if you limit yourself to your family, then it includes all your immediate family members, and you can extend it also to your grandparents and so on. Your concern extends to a large number of other beings.

2. To change this mental attitude of self-cherishing, we have to develop an understanding of how the self-cherishing mind is very narrow, whereas the mind

which cherishes other beings is thinking very broadly. If you think of the cause of your own problems, they are related to your own self-cherishing mind. This is because we are so attached to ourself that the self can never be fulfilled, and fully pleased. From this point of view, we can see how, by undertaking this mental training to overcome and diminish this self-cherishing mind, we can rid ourselves of all our problems.

As said before, when we think of making a contribution to our family, our country and to the world, it need not be material aid, because the majority of the problems of other beings do not always involve the lack of material conditions such as food, shelter and so forth. Through cultivating and showing true love and compassion towards other beings, not only are we benefiting those other beings, but also our country, and the world. We can see that promoting true peace in the world has to come from the mind - from changing the mental attitude and mind of all the beings living in the world. When that is changed into bringing more qualities of compassion in the minds of all, then they will feel secure, because there is safety and peace in the environment in which they live

I promised last week that we would start the lam rim teaching this week, so to keep this promise I shall at least say a few words. Of the six perfections, we are up to the last two perfections of concentration and wisdom. We have been discussing the topic of the perfection of concentration, which is specifically about calm abiding. Last year we discussed all the necessary conditions we must gather to achieve calm abiding, and we also completed the topic of the actual means of achieving calm abiding, which is applying the eight antidotes to remove the five obstacles or faults. The next topic of calm abiding is *By Depending Upon The Actual Means Of Calm Abiding, How To Achieve The Nine States Of Mental Abiding*.

Last week's teaching went for a very long time, so this week it is shorter. Geshe-la said that he may be like pigeons who behave in a way opposite to what you might expect, hoping that it will be of some benefit. You can notice that during the summer when it is hot, pigeons move to hotter places thinking it will bring more warmth during the winter. During the winter they take shelter in the shade hoping that the summer will not be too hot. Likewise last week was very long, but this week is short, in the hope that both are beneficial.

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ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅད་སྤྱོད་པ།



21 March 2000

Generate the bodhicitta motivation, which is to think that these lam rim teachings that we are receiving are to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. At the same time, generate the motivation to put these teachings into practice to be a cause to achieve the bodhicitta mind.

422.331.212 The Actual Means Of Calm Abiding

Last year we completed this topic, which comprises the five faults or obstacles to achieving calm abiding, and the eight remedies to these faults.

422.331.213 How to Achieve the Nine Mental States

དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སེམས་གནས་དག་སྒྲུབ་ཚུལ།

This next main heading, about how to achieve the nine mental abidings, is a very important topic, because it provides a measure of one's progress in achieving calm abiding or, in other words, the degree of concentration achieved.

The nine mental abidings are:

1. Placing the Mind

སེམས་འཛོལ་པ།

2. Continuous Placement

རྒྱུན་དུ་འཛོལ་པ།

3. Patch-like Placement

གྲུབ་ཏེ་འཛོལ་པ།

4. Close Placement

ཉེ་བར་འཛོལ་པ།

5. Controlling The Mind

དུལ་བར་བྱེད་པ།

6. Pacifying

ཞི་བར་བྱེད་པ།

7. Thoroughly Pacifying

རྒྱལ་པར་ཞི་བར་བྱེད་པ།

8. Single-pointed Concentration

ཚུལ་གཅིག་ཏུ་བྱེད་པ།

9. Placement with Equanimity

མཉམ་པར་འཛོལ་པ།

There are six forces which are the means to achieve these nine mental abidings. If we discuss each one of these mental abidings along with the force which is the main means to achieve that state, then this will give a clearer

understanding of each of these mental abidings.

422.331.213.1 Placing the Mind

The literal meaning is closer to 'drawing the mind inward'.

Placing the mind is the first accomplishment of the state of meditative concentration. Having chosen a favourite object such as an image of a deity, one then tries to direct or focus the mind on that object. At this first level one is able to actually place the mind on the given object.

The first mental abiding is said to be achieved mainly through the force of listening or studying. The reason why one is actually able to place the mind on the object, and so to achieve the first mental concentration, is said to be by the virtue of one's study or understanding of the chosen object. This understanding might have been gained through hearing, or through receiving instructions from the guru and so forth. It is said that at the first level, even though one is able to focus the mind on the object, that focus does not come from one's own familiarity with the meditation practice, or from continuous reflection upon the object. Rather one is able to direct the mind to it mainly by just knowing that object. So at the first mental abiding, the level of concentration is sufficient only to be able to tie the mind to the object.

The actual level of mental concentration of the first mental abiding is so weak that it is said that if we investigate and observe our mind, we can see that there are very gross and forceful distractions in our mind, rather than any real concentration on the object. Even though the mental distractions are so great and forceful in the first mental abiding, it is said that just recognising them is the sign of progress rather than any failure. The only reason why one is able to recognise a great deal of mental distraction is because of greater awareness of one's mind.

422.331.213.2 Continuous Placement

With the second mental abiding, continuous mental placement, one is not only able to place the mind on the object as in the case of the first mental abiding, but also able to sustain the continuity of that concentration. It is said that the indication of having reached the second mental abiding is when one's mental abiding lasts as long as it takes one to recite a round of the mala or rosary of the six syllable Chenrezig mantra - Om Mani Padme Hung.

Unlike the first mental abiding the level of mental distractions is neither continuous, nor always very strong. Indeed there are both times when there are

mental distractions, and times where there are no mental distractions at all in one's meditation. Overall it is said that in the second mental abiding there are periods when the mental distractions take a rest, and this is the difference from the first mental abiding.

Of the six forces, the second mental abiding is mainly achieved through the force of thinking. This is because one's ability to prolong the length of one's mental abiding is said to be mainly because of one's efforts in trying to familiarise the mind with the object, by contemplating it over and over again.

The Four Types of Mental Attention

There are four types of mental attentions, which also distinguish the nine mental abidings. For the first two mental abidings, the type of mental attention applied is called forceful attention. Even though, in the first two mental abidings, the level of abiding is interrupted by obstacles, mental sinking or excitement, it is said that we mainly apply forceful attention rather than interrupted attention. This is because the obstacles (mainly mental sinking or excitement) are so great that forceful attention is necessary.

422.331.213.3 Patch-like Placement

The third mental abiding is called Patch-like Placement, as it is like putting a patch over a hole in a piece of cloth. Compared with the second mental abiding, when you reach the third level the duration of the abiding is longer, and the duration of the mental distractions is shorter. This is because as soon as any mental distraction arises, the meditator can recognise this. Not only that, but the meditator can also immediately apply an antidote to remove it. The result is that the duration of mental abiding is longer.

During the third mental abiding a strong force of mindfulness is generated. If any distractions arise during the meditation, the meditator is able to overcome that distraction and place the mind back onto the object. This is because the meditator has achieved a strong force of mindfulness.

422.331.213.4 Close Placement

Through further increasing the force of mindfulness it is said that one will reach the fourth mental abiding which is close placement. As the force of mindfulness reaches its peak level, it is very obvious during the fourth mental abiding that the length of concentration is even further extended in comparison to the first three mental abidings. At the fourth mental abiding, since one has fully developed the force of mindfulness, it is impossible for the meditator to lose the object.

At this fourth level the meditator still has to apply the antidotes to mental sinking and excitement, as both of these can still be present. In fact to understand each level of mental abiding properly it is essential to have a good understanding of the five faults and the eight antidotes that we have we previously discussed. To be better able to understand this level of abiding we have to know that there are both subtle and gross forms of mental sinking and excitement.

The third and fourth mental abidings are mainly achieved through the force of mindfulness. The reason is that during the third mental abiding, even though the meditator still experiences mental distractions, he or she

is able to remove them immediately they occur, and so progress to this level of mental abiding. This is because as soon as the object is lost the meditator is able to bring it back, through the force of mindfulness, likewise in the fourth mental abiding. The difference between the third and the fourth mental abiding is that at the fourth level the meditator never loses the object of the meditation. Why? Because of the full development of the force of mindfulness.

It is important to try to combine your study of the current topic with revision of earlier ones, because they are linked to each other. The earlier ones are therefore very important and a good understanding of them is essential. Revision of all the previous topics not only improves your understanding of them, but it makes the current topic clearer, so there is no point in skimming over them.

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28 March 2000

Generating a bodhicitta mind at the beginning of a practice has the benefit of planting the seed of bodhicitta in your mind. There is also the benefit of remembering the qualities of the Buddhas. You have just cultivated the bodhicitta motivation so try to let it arise again, from the depth of your heart wishing for the state of Buddhahood, so as to be able to enlighten all beings, and also generate the motivation to put the teachings into practice.

422.331.213.5 Controlling the Mind

དུལ་བར་བྱེད་པ།

We are up to the fifth stage of mental abiding which is Controlling The Mind. During this stage of mental abiding joyous effort is generated, and one engages in meditative concentration by remembering all the qualities of single-pointed concentration. Any mental sinking or excitement that arises in one's meditation practice is overcome by remembering the benefits of concentration. Through remembering these qualities, one generates joyous effort and re-engages in the concentration. This explanation is based on Lama Tsong Khapa's lam rim text, *Great Exposition to the Stages of the Path*.

The text *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand* explains the fifth abiding by saying that at the fourth mental abiding there is a great danger of subtle mental sinking arising, because in that stage the mind is too inwardly withdrawn. Therefore in the fifth stage the meditator overcomes that danger of mental sinking by contemplating the benefits of concentration, and by strengthening **the force of alertness**. Through alertness and mindfulness of the benefits of concentration the mind is then uplifted, and so in this way the meditator overcomes subtle mental sinking.

422.331.213.6 Pacifying

ཞི་བར་བྱེད་པ།

The sixth mental abiding is called Pacifying. What are being pacified are the mental distractions, which are the main cause of the fault of excitement in meditation. Pacifying also refers to pacifying the thought of not liking concentration, or losing interest in concentration as a result of mental distractions arising in the mind. In this sixth stage the meditator has pacified all these obstacles.

In the fifth mental abiding of Controlling the Mind, the meditator is uplifted through the force of alertness, and by reflecting on the qualities of concentration, in order to overcome the fault which arises from a too inwardly withdrawn mind. However at the same time it is said that if the mind is uplifted too much, then there is the danger of the subtle form of excitement arising. Therefore in the sixth stage the meditator particularly generates **the force of alertness** to overcome this danger.

We can also differentiate between the various mental abidings in terms of mental sinking and excitement. For instance it is said that up to the fourth mental abiding there are the coarse forms of both mental sinking and excitement. When the fifth mental abiding is reached one is free from the gross or coarse form of both mental sinking and excitement. However although in the fifth stage there is still the danger of subtle mental sinking arising, this danger does not exist in the sixth mental abiding. In terms of the six forces, the fifth and the sixth mental abidings are achieved mainly by applying the force of alertness.

422.331.213.7 Completely Pacifying

རྒྱུ་བར་ཞི་བར་བྱེད་པ།

The seventh mental abiding is called Completely Pacifying. Lama Tsong Khapa's text, *The Great Exposition to the Stages of the Path*, says that what is pacified here are obstacles such as the desirous mind, the unhappy mind, the dull and sleepy minds and so forth. In the seventh mental abiding the meditator especially applies **the force of joyous effort** because the forces of mindfulness and alertness have been fully developed in the fifth and the sixth mental abidings respectively.

Compared to the previous two stages of mental abiding, in the seventh mental abiding, through especially applying the force of joyous effort the meditator is much more alert to mental sinking and excitement, and so is even able to overcome the subtle forms of both. Because the meditator joins the force of joyous effort to the fully developed forces of mindfulness and alertness, there is a very small chance of any mental sinking or excitement (even of the subtle form) arising.

In the seventh mental abiding the meditator generates the confidence that he or she is no longer likely to be overpowered by mental sinking or excitement. With this confidence, it is said that at this stage it is very unlikely that mental sinking or excitement will even arise. If they do, they are so weak that rather than overpowering the meditator, they are easily defeated by the concentration of the meditator. So even if any mental sinking or excitement arises there is no danger to concentration. Whereas at the fifth and sixth stages the meditator doubts whether their concentration can overpower mental sinking and excitement.

422.331.213.8 Single-Pointed Concentration

ཚུལ་ཅིག་ཏུ་བྱེད་པ།

The eighth mental abiding is Single-Pointed Concentration, which is the ability to focus the mind on the object for as long as the meditator wishes. However it is said that this concentration in the eighth mental abiding is dependent upon the exertion of effort by the meditator. Of the six forces the seventh and the eighth mental abiding are achieved through **the force of joyous effort**. With effort the meditator is able to focus the mind on the object for as long as he or she wants, and in this eighth stage it is said that there is absolutely no danger that the enemies of mental sinking or excitement will arise.

When one reaches the eighth stage of mental abiding, both mental sinking and excitement have been progressively eliminated. So there is no need for the meditator to apply the force of mindfulness and alertness over and over again. Rather it is said that the only time the meditator needs to apply these forces is at the beginning of the meditation. However once the mind is placed on the object single-pointedly it remains there very effortlessly, and almost naturally. So there is no interruption by mental sinking and excitement. Of the four mental attentions, the type of mental attention you generate in the eighth stage is **uninterrupted attention**.

To differentiate the different mental abidings in terms of the four mental attentions it is said that [the first two mental abidings rely upon forceful attention], the five mental abidings from the third up to the seventh rely upon interrupted mental attention, which means that the concentration during those stages is interrupted by

mental sinking and excitement. The eighth mental abiding, however, relies upon uninterrupted mental attention because there is no interruption by mental sinking and excitement at all.

422.331.213.9 Abiding With Equanimity

མཉམ་པར་འཇུག་པ།

The ninth mental abiding is Abiding With Equanimity, which is a mental state of concentration in which the meditator, without any effort, focuses the mind on the object for as long as he or she wishes. It is said that the ability to do this is mainly achieved through **the force of familiarity**. This ninth mental abiding is also called the 'single-pointed mind of the desire realm', as well as 'constructed calm abiding'.

Of the four mental attentions the ninth is characterised by effortless attention. So the obvious difference between the eighth and ninth mental abiding is whether the focusing of the mind on the object is achieved with, or without effort. The eighth mental abiding is single-pointed concentration with effort and the ninth one is without effort.

Is it literally without any effort at all? It is said that sentient beings cannot perform an action without any effort, as it is only a fully enlightened being who can perform an act without any effort. To clarify this question the commentary says that the need for effort is in the between sessions of the concentration. So our understanding of the eighth mental abiding is that it depends upon effort not only at the beginning, but the sustained continuation of that concentration also depends on effort. In other words in the eighth stage even after beginning the concentration, it is said the meditator needs to exert some effort now and then in order to maintain that single-pointed concentration.

In the ninth mental abiding however it is said that the only time where there is need to exert effort is at the beginning, and after that it is not necessary for the meditator to exert any effort at all to sustain the concentration. This is one way of clarifying this point. Another way of interpreting the meaning of 'effort' and 'without effort' is to differentiate between the eighth and the ninth concentrations in terms of the relative extent of effort.

The only additional qualities one needs to achieve to attain the state of calm abiding is the bliss of mental and physical pliancy. Of course the criteria of having actually achieved calm abiding will come later, but here all we need to know is that in the ninth mental abiding the meditator, without any effort, can focus the mind on the object as they wish. By being familiar with this single-pointed concentration, and effortlessly practising it over and over again then it is said that eventually one will experience the bliss of mental and physical pliancy. When one experiences that bliss, then it is said that calm abiding is achieved.

The lam-rim commentary, *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, mentions how you can differentiate between these nine mental abidings¹.

- The difference between the first and the second abiding is in terms of how long you focus or stabilise the mind on the object.
- The second and the third abidings are differentiated in terms of the duration of the mental distractions which arise.
- The third and the fourth differ in terms of the occurrence of losing the object.
- The fourth and the fifth are differentiated in terms of the arising of gross mental sinking.
- The difference between the fifth and sixth is whether you have any doubt with regard to subtle mental sinking arising. In addition, in the sixth mental abiding the extent to which even subtle excitement arises is very low compared with the fifth abiding.
- The sixth and seventh are differentiated in terms of whether one should be concerned about whether subtle mental sinking and excitement has arisen.
- With the seventh and eighth abidings there is the question of whether there is any mental sinking and excitement at all.

- For the eighth and ninth abidings the difference is whether it is with, or without effort.

We have now covered the first three main headings: the first is 422.331.211 The Suitable Conditions To Gather To Achieve Calm Abiding; the second major heading is 422.331.212 The Actual Means Of Achieving Calm Abiding which concerns the five obstacles and the eight antidotes. The third major heading is 433.331.213 By Relying On The Actual Means How To Achieve These Nine Mental Abidings, which we have just finished.

The fourth heading is 422.331.214 The Six Forces².

Next week is discussion week. Geshe-la encourages everyone to attend and to participate in the discussions. The compulsory question for the written test it will be to explain the meaning of this quotation from Maitreya's text *The Ornament of Sutra*. The proper translation is

Any place where the wise practise
Has excellent provisions; is a wholesome place;
Is a healthy location; has noble friends at hand;
And has facilities to satisfy the yogi.

If you study the first condition which concerns suitable place you will not need to ask Geshe-la or any other teacher about the place you should choose to do your practice!

Geshe-la: Can you remember the six suitable conditions?

Student: Suitable place?

Geshe-la: That is included in the first condition. You have to consider the most suitable conditions, which should be present in terms of the place or the environment where you do the meditation practice. When it says suitable place in addition to the actual environment it includes all the other necessary resources such as easy accessibility, easy access of food and having good friends and so on.

The second condition is having less desire but more contentment. This condition is basically asking what suitable conditions you should possess from your own side. You have to think that from your own side it is important to have minimum desire and have a very contented mind. From your own side if you do not give up the various daily activities you have not met the suitable conditions for you to pursue this calm abiding.

It's good to study the first heading about suitable conditions thoroughly. You should not think that you only have study this if your interest is to achieve calm abiding. In fact this topic is something which is essential and very beneficial to learn if you are to pursue any meditation practice. Learning this topic also helps to both focus one's mind, and implant some seeds in the mind.

You don't have to feel tense, because we are all fortunate beings. Geshe-la says a fortunate being is someone who is not deprived of the opportunity of Dharma, or of what the world can offer. So we are doubly fortunate.

Sometimes fortunate beings are bodhisattvas, which state we may not have attained. A part of the initiation ceremonies includes the question "Who are you?" to which you reply "I am a fortunate one." So in a sense you are saying that you are a bodhisattva. Then the next question is "What do you seek?" to which you reply "I seek great bliss." So in that context when you say that you are a fortunate person you are implying "I am a bodhisattva". Geshe-la is saying we are not deprived of what the world can offer, so have tea and enjoy yourself!

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic
Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy

¹ *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Rev Edition, 1993, Wisdom Publications, page 671

² *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* calls them The Six Forces

TARA INSTITUTE
STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT 4 April 2000

Covering discourses 07/03 00 - 28/03/00

1. Why is this human life considered to be so precious?
2. Why does our attachment to this life lead to dissatisfaction and suffering?
3. What are the '3 scopes' of spiritual practice? How do these differ in terms of motivation and goal? What are the main practices to be followed within each scope?
4. Discuss the advantages of cherishing others and the disadvantages of self cherishing.
5. List the 5 faults and 8 remedies mentioned under the heading 'the actual means of achieving calm-abiding'.
6. The nine mental abidings are as follows:
 1. Placing the mind
 2. Continuous placement
 3. Patch like Placement
 4. Close placement
 5. Controlling the mind
 6. Pacifying
 7. Thoroughly pacifying
 8. Single pointed concentration
 9. Placement with Equanimity

Briefly describe each level of abiding. Which of the 6 forces is cultivated by the meditator on each level of abiding? List the 4 types of attention.

Compulsory question

7. Discuss the meaning of the following verse from Maitreya's text 'The Ornament of Sutras'

Any place where the wise practise
Has excellent provisions; is a wholesome place;
Is a healthy location; has noble friends at hand;
And has facilities to satisfy the yogi.

T A R A I N S T I T U T E

(Study Group Test)

11th April, 2000

Answer any four from question.no.1-6

Question.no.7 is compulsory

Time allowed one hour

1. Why does our attachment to this life lead to dissatisfaction and suffering?
1. a)How do the three stages of the Path differ in terms of motivation and goal?
b)Is it necessary for one to follow these three in order to achieve the state of Buddhahood?
c)If so, how can one combine the three in a single Path to Enlightenment?
1. Discuss the advantages of cherishing others and the disadvantages of self-cherishing.
1. What are the eight remedies to counteract the five obstacles to achieve calm abiding?
1. Briefly describe each state of nine mental abiding.
1. Identify mental sinking and excitement.
1. (Compulsory)
Discuss the meaning of the following lines from Maitreya's "the Ornament of Sutras".

“Any place where the wise practice
Has excellent provisions; is a wholesome place;
Is a healthy location; has noble friends at hand;
And has facilities to satisfy the yogi.”